

# The Affiliate as Mentoring Network: The Lasting Work of the Carolinas WPA

Meg Morgan, Marsha Lee Baker, Wendy Sharer,  
and Tracy Ann Morse

*The national CWPA has made impressive strides to advance mentoring opportunities for its membership, yet, as surveys of the membership have indicated, there are still notable gaps in these opportunities. Drawing on our experiences as founders (Meg and Marsha Lee) and leaders (all four of us) of the Carolinas WPA affiliate (established in 2003), we explore the critical role that regional WPA affiliates have to play in addressing mentoring gaps. We suggest that affiliates can enable broad individual and institutional mentoring work within a geographic region, can empower members by allowing for frequent communication and face-to-face contact, and can provide needed opportunities for multi-directional, non-hierarchical mentoring relationships.*

A report on the “CWPA Mentoring Project and Survey” in the fall/winter 2010 issue of *WPA* revealed a gap in the mentoring support that the national organization provides for WPAs working outside of Research I institutions. In response, the assistant editors of *WPA* solicited stories from WPAs at such institutions with the goal of learning “what the council could do better to train future WPAs, mentor new WPAs, and support the work of experienced WPAs in diverse institutional settings” (Ostergaard, Giberson, and Nugent 148). Several of the pieces received in response were published as “A Symposium on Mentoring the Work of WPAs,” in the fall/winter 2011 issue of the journal. Commenting on the narratives and the “overwhelming response” to their call for contributions, the symposium editors note that “new administrators . . . need mentors who will help them make productive sense of the institutional and individual contexts in which they do their work” (149). At the same time, the editors note, there are mentoring needs that appear to cross the diverse situations in which new WPAs work. For example, new administrators “need someone to listen to their stories of success, frustration, and failure” (149). Mentorship of new WPAs, in other words, should include plentiful opportunities for listening, affirmation, encouragement, and commiseration.

We suggest that regional, affiliate WPA organizations can foster this kind of mentoring because they can provide multiple, accessible, welcoming opportunities for new WPAs at all types of institutions to share stories and ask questions in a supportive environment. At the same time, affiliate

organizations can function as venues for experienced WPAs to garner support for their efforts to adapt and apply emerging disciplinary knowledge to changing institutional contexts. Furthermore, the regional affiliate has the ability to offer quick access to and rapid circulation of locally relevant writing program information and to allow for more targeted, strategic information-sharing in efforts to persuade institutional leaders to maintain or even elevate support for writing programs. In short, the regional affiliate is uniquely positioned to allow programs to mentor other programs: assistance and guidance become collective and collaborative, with stakeholders from various writing programs supporting one another.

We articulate more fully below the mentoring potential of a regional affiliate, interspersed with narrative accounts of our experiences as members and leaders of the Carolinas Writing Program Administrators (CarWPA). Our intent is not to offer a self-indulgent encomium; rather, we hope these narrative accounts serve as evidence of how, within affiliate WPA groups, diverse kinds of mentoring can happen, crossing institutional types (private liberal arts institutions, community colleges, public research-intensive universities, public teaching-focused institutions, etc.), community settings (urban, suburban, rural, online), career statuses (tenured faculty, tenure-track faculty, non-tenure-track faculty, graduate students), and administrative generations (well-established WPAs in longstanding programs, newly tenured WPAs in developing programs, untenured faculty in incipient programs, and graduate students new to the profession). The four of us recount the desire for individual and inter-institutional mentoring that led to the birth of CarWPA and that has established it as a dynamic organization, responsive to the mentoring needs of succeeding generations of WPAs in the Carolinas. We conclude by commenting on mentoring challenges that CarWPA faces today, with the hope that other affiliates might direct proactive attention to these areas and that we might hear suggestions from other WPA affiliates for addressing these challenges. We have included our email addresses in our author biographies for this purpose.

#### WHAT DO WE MEAN BY “MENTORING”?

We begin by situating our CarWPA experiences within recent conversations about mentoring in composition and rhetoric. We see the CarWPA organization as a model of what Lynée Lewis Gaillet and Michelle F. Eble call “mentoring networks” (284). The “relationships in a network model” of mentoring, Gaillet and Eble explain, “are multi-faceted, multi-directional, and mutually beneficial” (287). They “disrupt hierarchies, are accessible as needs arise, and emphasize reciprocity” (283). Similarly, Cheryl Glenn

and Roxanne Mountford, drawing on the work of Black Feminist Alexis Gumbs, encourage those in composition and rhetoric to think of mentoring as “a site where we influence at the same time that we are being influenced within a dynamic system that is constantly shifting” (188). Elizabeth Keller likewise suggests that, in both classroom and professional contexts, “investment mentoring” might be a particularly useful replacement for traditional top-down versions of mentoring: “Investment mentoring . . . delineates how rhetoric and writing can shift away from master/apprentice models of mentoring and learning, and instead privilege mentoring as rhetorical work that builds productive relationships” (8). In this model of mentoring, the goal is not the individual advancement and success of mentees but rather the establishment of strong relationships that enable all involved to be more effective.

We have also found scholarship that addresses mentoring in professional organizations and workplaces to be helpful in writing this article, in part because so much of what WPAs are expected to do overlaps with what workplace administrators are expected to do. The concept of the “mentoring episode” is particularly helpful for understanding the nature and value of mentoring that happens through CarWPA. Kathy E. Kram and Belle Rose Ragins explain in *The Handbook of Mentoring at Work: Theory, Research, and Practice* that “mentoring episodes” are “growth-fostering interactions . . . that involve increased zest, empowered action, self-esteem, new knowledge, and a desire for more connection” (659). Kram and Ragins situate these time-limited mentoring interactions at the foundation of productive, long-term mentoring. Also useful in thinking about the unique mentoring value of the affiliate WPA is the emphasis Kram and Ragins place on personalities and compassion in mentoring relationships. Research in workplace mentoring suggests that “relational competencies,” such as emotional intelligence, empathy, and compassion, may be highly important in determining the success of mentoring relationships, particularly in terms of promoting a mentee’s personal, in addition to professional, development (659). CarWPA meetings offer an environment where these “relational competencies” can be developed. Perhaps because of traditionally limited models of mentoring, or perhaps because of a general skepticism and/or mistrust in academia of personality and emotions as factors in success or failure, personality (mis)alignment and emotional capability do not receive much attention in mentoring literature. At the same time, mentoring relationships in the academy often jettisoned such goals, focusing instead on pairing a “more experienced” faculty member with a “less experienced” faculty member in the same program with the instrumental goal of the mentee’s promotion. With the exception of very large programs, this model leaves precious

little room for choice or adjustments in mentoring relationships should a pair not “mesh.” In the sections that follow, we highlight how the structural framework and regular interaction of an affiliate WPA can provide mentees with multiple opportunities to meet possible mentors in settings that increase the likelihood of personality-emotional compatibility and that allow relational competencies of empathy and compassion to develop.

#### THE REGIONAL AFFILIATE AS AFFECTIVE MENTORING NETWORK

This article originated several years ago in the form of short narrative histories written by Meg and Marsha Lee, both of whom realized that the lessons learned and benefits accrued during the first decade of CarWPA were at risk as founding members moved on or retired. Wendy and Tracy also saw the value in these narrative histories and agreed to continue documenting the challenges and successes of the organization. For all four of us, a desire to pursue this project likewise arose from a deep appreciation of the support and compassion we have come to know through CarWPA. The narrative details we include throughout the rest of this article, in addition to supporting our claim about the professional mentoring functions of regional affiliates, are intended to highlight the personal impact the organization has had on us.

As noted above, engagement, compassion, and connection are central components of productive mentoring. Ensuring that WPAs—past, present, and future—feel welcome to the CarWPA affiliate has taken priority since the early days of the organization. The goal is not just to have greater numbers, but also to have greater engagement and impact. For these reasons, CarWPA founding members focused on breaking from traditional “academic conference” models of meeting, drawing instead on principles of hospitality. Marsha Lee notes,

*As I review archives of early board meetings and conferences from over fifteen years ago, I recognize kinship as a guiding principle in CarWPA’s development. The Executive Board immediately focused on face-to-face access. We wanted to physically gather people on a regular basis so that we would literally experience ourselves as colleagues over time, develop kinship, and support individual and collaborative short- and long-term WPA endeavors. From the outset, our goal has been to be hospitable, particularly by “generating a friendly and safe environment,” one of several principles of the hospitality industry (Chon and Maier 5). We did not want to add to the pressure and anxiety typically experienced by WPAs*

*to attend and present at one more conference, to keep in constant contact with another professional network, or to perceive affiliation with CarWPA as another rung on the professional ladder.*

The location of these annual retreat-conferences also contributes to the mentoring potential of the group. We meet in late September, as leaves are starting to turn, at Wildacres Retreat Center, located atop a mountain in western North Carolina. The natural beauty, combined with removal from the stress of daily WPA work life, promotes an atmosphere of openness, trust, and camaraderie among mentors and mentees, as we recall from our experiences at Wildacres:

***Marsba Lee:*** *The breathtaking mountainous view and isolated setting are, pardon the cliché, priceless. To this day, the gathering includes a bonfire, time for hiking in the surrounding mountains, and nightly social gatherings with games. Wildacres allows groups to bring snacks and adult beverages, which we set up in the canteen for our own happy hour.*

***Wendy:*** *One of the most energizing and sustaining aspects of CarWPA is the “retreatness” of our gatherings, particularly our annual fall gathering. Hearing cautionary tales surrounded by the natural calming beauty of the mountains has been invaluable. This is a far cry from what often happens at a big national meeting in a hotel or convention center complex with countless concurrent sessions. I always leave Wildacres feeling that I have a strong network of supportive and friendly mentors that I can contact anytime for advice, information, or moral support.*

***Tracy:*** *It is important to us to maintain a retreat quality to our fall conference. We have done well to protect part of the time on our agenda to be unplanned retreat time—some attendees hike, read, write, visit, or nap during this time. Recently, we invited participants to propose retreat activities from yoga to Appalachian plant identification walks.*

Unlike many larger academic conferences, CarWPA gatherings also focus on involving all who attend in all sessions, as Tracy, who served as president of the CarWPA until 2017, explains,

*Even at our multi-day fall meeting, the leadership of the organization does what it can to enable the engagement of faculty with different institutional demands. Rather than requiring formal presentations—with the attendant work of scholarly research, bibliography, PowerPoint or handout development, preparation for Q&A, etc.—participation and a spot on the official program typically involves sharing informal position statements, assignment overviews, rubrics, summaries of program structures and components, teaching ideas, or research projects in various*

*stages. We often frame these presentations as discussion starters or even pitches to get feedback on, emphasizing the collegiality and camaraderie of our affiliate.*

Individuals or groups identified as “presenters” often guide writing sessions, sometimes including sharing and responding. Additionally, CarWPA gatherings regularly provide time for writing and sharing of writing because leaders of the organization recognize that it is close to a universal truth, especially in tenure-track positions, that WPAs struggle to balance writing, teaching, and administration. Occasionally, then, our meetings do lead to publications and contribute to individual professional advancement in the way that “traditional” mentoring might. CarWPA gatherings have, however, always been configured to foster the kinds of relationships that, Diana Ashe and Elizabeth Ervin suggest, are essential to successful, long-term, non-hierarchical mentoring. Ashe and Ervin affirm the value of traditional formal mentoring arrangements, such as departmental or university programs that pair junior scholars with tenured faculty, but they also suggest that such models take “a short-sighted view of mentoring by conforming to the familiar dyadic relationship of mentor and mentee but paying little attention to the networks of affiliation that support long-term commitment to the academic enterprise” (90). For “networks of affiliation” to be fully effective sites of mentoring, Ashe and Ervin continue, they should be characterized by friendships that “encourage openness and risk-taking, [and that] seek to counter the ‘hyper-individualism’ of exclusive relationships” (90). Ashe and Ervin further explain that networks of affiliation “can be actively promoted . . . by positioning likeable people in ‘affective hubs’ that allow them to foster collaborations among people who might not otherwise interact” (91). In their chapter, Ashe and Ervin apply the concept of the “affective hub,” which is important to mentoring frameworks in the field of business (see Casciaro and Lobo), to mentoring situations in rhetoric and composition, and we believe this concept is also beneficial when thinking about mentoring scenarios in writing program administration. CarWPA, through the informal, inviting, low-pressure retreat environment of its annual fall meeting, functions as such an “affective hub,” serving as an inviting “safe place” for mentees to ask questions and discover contexts that are essential to their, and their programs’, success. As Wendy explains,

*As a new WPA who wanted to minimize risks but didn’t know how to identify those risks, particularly within a complex state university system, I headed to Wildacres for the first time with eagerness, but also a bit of fear because I knew that I’d be interacting closely with WPAs from all over the Carolinas. I didn’t want to look stupid. From the first eve-*

*ning—which involved a variety of icebreakers followed by games and adult refreshments in the “canteen”—I knew I had nothing to fear from this group in this setting. I was lucky enough to room with and learn from Nancy Penrose, an experienced WPA at NC State at the time. I also spent a lot of time eating M&Ms and talking with Meg who, in addition to bringing the M&Ms to the mountains every year, had developed a good understanding of the UNC System and the complexities and nuances of WPA work within it. There was no way I could have learned what I did about the state educational system or the state political climate had I not experienced that welcoming atmosphere and the open conversations that it fostered during our few days on top of the mountain.*

Holding conversations about potentially politically charged topics is easier when surrounded by natural beauty rather than institutional furniture, over-patterned carpeting, and the stark lighting of campus buildings or conference hotels. CarWPA provides an aspect of mentoring that D. R. Dunbar and R. T. Kinnersley call “psychosocial development,” which involves “helping develop the mentee’s self-confidence and sense of competence and providing acceptance and confirmation, counseling, role modeling, and friendship” (19).

The inviting environment of CarWPA also comes through the bi-directional (or multi-directional) mentoring it enables. In contrast to what Gaillet and Eble describe as “the traditional top-down hierarchical form of mentoring,” (283) in which younger professionals typically take an “apprenticeship” role, CarWPA gatherings regularly involve scenarios in which the “seasoned” WPAs learn from the “newbies.” Marsha Lee conveys her appreciation for the intergenerational and bidirectional mentoring work of CarWPA:

*When we met in 1999, Meg was a seasoned academic and experienced leader with substantial knowledge of the UNC System. I, on the other hand, was in the second year of a tenure-track position, for which I had been hired as the English Department’s first ever rhetoric-composition specialist. Meg’s invitation to meet at CCCC brought with it a rush of joy and relief. I yearned for the company of rhet-comp folks who knew my disciplinary focus and who could advise and contextualize my WPA work. I could not think of any reason not to want to be a part of a regional organization of WPAs. Along the way, I have been educated by colleagues younger and savvier than me; I have been sustained by the wisest veterans I could ever hope to know. I have introduced lecturers and new tenure-track colleagues from my university to our regional affiliate because, as grand as national is, local is likewise irreplaceable.*

These kinds of experiences suggest that cross-institutional and cross-generational regional affiliates such as CarWPA can help us follow Amy Stolley's valuable advice that we should "expand our notion of mentoring to create space for the questions more experienced WPAs might have of early career WPAs: 'What made you choose this? What can your experiences teach me about newer generations of WPAs? What can I learn about my own experience from listening to you?'" (24).

Through their capacity for fostering camaraderie and engagement, regional affiliates can also potentially expand the boundaries of our discipline by inviting WPAs in a greater variety of locations and institutions to become part of our community. As Glenn and Mountford point out, "In real terms, a 'discipline' is made up of relationships among individuals who dwell together for a time and then go forth to do work inspired, in part, by their mentors and friends" (183–84). A mentoring network in a regional organization enables more people, from a greater variety of institutional contexts, to "dwell" with others as mentors and to engage in the affective work of mentoring that inspires trust and friendship.

#### THE REGIONAL AFFILIATE AS ACCESSIBLE MENTORING NETWORK

The success of efforts to include more WPAs within the mentoring network, of course, depends on the ability of WPAs to attend events. Wildacres was selected as a mentoring site for CarWPA for several reasons, not the least of which were cost and drivability. As Marsha Lee explains, the decision included careful consideration of how people would get to the retreat and, once there, how they could afford to stay:

*To open our hub to a broad swath of participants, we had to consider location, location, location. Aware of the relatively low salaries and limited professional development resources for many WPAs in the Carolinas, we searched for a conference site that was accessible in time, money, and miles, and we found Wildacres Retreat near Little Switzerland in North Carolina. Wildacres is amazingly affordable: at the time of this writing in 2018 costs are \$220 for two nights, five meals, plus gas. Travel times range from 2 to 7 hours, averaging about 3 to 4 hours for participants. The Board intentionally timed the meeting early in the semester to avoid the academic calendar's sharp dive into the "I can't do one more thing" mode. Most attendees stay the entire time, although it is not uncommon for some to come late or leave early, which allows greater attendance.*

Cost and accessibility are particularly important to early-career WPAs, the group that most needs mentoring. As Wendy reflects,

*When I first attended a CarWPA fall retreat at Wildacres in 2004, I was an Assistant Professor, just starting the second year of an administrative post. I honestly do not remember how I heard about the group: I just remember thinking that, although it was a bit of a drive from my institution in eastern NC, the cost seemed very reasonable, particularly considering that it included lodging and meals.*

A regional affiliate is beneficial for mentoring not only because it can bring a wider swath of people together through affordable (in terms of money and time) events but also because it can host such events more frequently than a large, national organization. Marsha Lee explains how the CarWPA responded quickly, efficiently, and economically to a need for more mentoring opportunities by creating a second annual gathering, a one-day “MinM”:

*In 2007–08, the CarWPA Board responded to the growing sense that we needed something more than one annual conference to sustain the mission of CarWPA. A year was too long to go for professional and personal relationships to develop apace. Frankly, we enjoyed each other’s company and the energy we took back to our home campuses. We also realized that the growing abundance of timely themes, issues, and initiatives were more than a single annual event could give adequate attention. So, we created Meeting in the Middle (MinM), a day-long meeting in February “in the middle” of our September-to-September stretch and at a more “middle” location among North and South Carolina campuses, Charlotte, so that most people could attend without an overnight stay. The one-day schedule, as well as a \$40 registration fee that includes lunch, makes it more affordable and convenient—less travel and fewer days away from on-campus responsibilities—for some WPAs to attend for their first time. Additionally, a BOGO option encouraged returning members to invite someone new.*

A regional affiliate, with gatherings that are geographically closer and less expensive than national conventions, helps WPAs working at smaller institutions or schools with a limited number of writing specialists to participate in mentoring. Specialists from other areas of English Studies can provide a certain level of mentoring for their writing studies colleagues, but, as Joyce Olewski Inman notes, support from such well-intentioned colleagues “is not the same as receiving mentoring from other compositionists who understand more fully the needs of a comprehensive writing program” (151). The national CWPA has provided wonderful resources and support for WPAs at large, research-focused institutions. Faculty at other types of institutions, however, have reported feeling that “CWPA seems overly

focused on the concerns of large research programs to the detriment of smaller institutions” (Walcher et al. 105). The most current available membership data, from the 2007 WPA Member Survey, suggests that these perceptions are grounded in reality: 58% of members reported affiliation with a doctorate-granting institution, while only 12% and 5% reported affiliation with a four-year college or a two-year college, respectively (Charlton and Rose 120). The organization has made efforts to address these concerns on the national level, but affiliate organizations provide a promising means for further engaging diverse types of institutions, as Wendy suggests,

*I've come to recognize valuable contributions that CarWPA makes to mentoring WPAs in the region, most notably to WPAs at smaller, teaching-focused schools. I am reminded of a story I heard at the first or second Wildacres meeting that I attended: an untenured WPA at a small, private liberal arts college relayed the story of "Uncle Steve"—not really her uncle, but that was his nickname on campus—the man all administrators went to see whenever they needed office supplies. While requesting supplies at my large state institution involved completing multiple forms and securing countless approvals from unknown individuals, her requests were very much dependent on one individual relationship: obviously, she needed very different advice/mentoring than I did when it came to navigating the channels of resource procurement. Fortunately, there were other WPAs from small schools at Wildacres (and in the larger CarWPA group) to help.*

Even today, many smaller two and four-year institutions do not have a specialist in composition and rhetoric; instead, someone from the English department—typically someone who has been trained in literary studies or creative writing—serves as the WPA. If these institutions hire someone with a background in rhetoric and composition to serve as the WPA, those specialists can find themselves as Darci Thoune did when she took a tenure-track WPA position at such an institution. As she explains, she was “under-prepared for what it meant to work in a department that had no established guidelines, expectations, or history of a WPA” (156). The national CWPA conference and workshops, Thoune notes, provided invaluable resources for approaching some of the challenges she faced, but the opportunity to use those resources comes only once a year, and participation is dependent upon often scarce funding. Thoune’s inclusion of the following details about her first national CWPA conference is telling: “Fortunately, the conference was in Minneapolis that year, which was close enough for me to drive . . . and I had a colleague living in Minneapolis who was willing to let me sleep in her spare room for a week” (157). Had Thoune been working

in the Carolinas, she would have had the opportunities of Wildacres and MinM to find the mentoring she needed.

Membership figures from CarWPA suggest that an affiliate group can support faculty from types of institutions that have not traditionally been well represented at the national level. As of 2014, individuals affiliated with four-year colleges (no graduate programs) accounted for 21% of membership, with individuals from doctoral-granting institutions accounting for 31% (as compared to 12% and 58%, respectively, in the national CWPA membership statistics from 2007). Furthermore, our executive board includes officers from two-year schools; four-year, BA-only schools; MA-granting schools; and PhD-granting institutions. The organization's ability to reach out to different types of institutions results from our awareness of and willingness to discuss our differences while also looking to identify common, pressing themes across those differences. As Tracy explains,

*Because we are diverse in academic positions and institutional homes, we often encounter different challenges and successes. Our two meetings a year as well as our listerv and social media sites are places we share these experiences. It is through these shared experiences that our Executive Board derives the themes for our events. CarWPA does not shy away from the controversial or political. Some of our most recent fall themes have been "Labor of Learning: WPA Concerns for Working Conditions" with John Warner, "Taking Action in the Carolinas" with Michelle LaFrance leading us to reflect on "A Poetics of Resilience, Refueling, and Resistance," and in 2017 "Communities and Contact Zones: Doing Justice" with Emma Howes and Christian Smith leading us with their keynote "Contemplating Race: Mindfulness as Antiracist Pedagogy."*

Despite CarWPA's success in involving people from smaller BA-granting institutions, we still struggle to involve those at two-year colleges. As we explain in the last section of the article, this is an area we hope to improve upon in the coming years.

#### THE REGIONAL AFFILIATE AS RESPONSIVE MENTORING NETWORK

Another way that an affiliate can help WPAs "make productive sense of the institutional and individual contexts in which they do their work" is by providing a network within which data and information can be compiled and accessed quickly (Ostergaard et al. 149). Through this network, WPAs who participate in regional affiliates can mentor one another at the same time that their programs empower each other. Given that many institutions compete with other regional institutions for students, faculty, and other resources, data from other regional institutions about critical program attri-

butes—such as curricula, assessment, course loads, class sizes, and salaries for non-tenure track faculty—can support arguments for improvement in a way that data from more distant institutions cannot. In the case of campuses within a state university system, data and experts from other state university campuses can bolster arguments for change, drawing rhetorical weight from external validation and intrastate competition for students and faculty. As Wendy notes, this rhetorical power can contribute to significant programmatic change:

*When I first started attending CarWPA gatherings in 2004, I hoped to use this group for leverage in making arguments for change on my campus. We've all likely had the experience where we make a well-supported case for something at our home institutions, but it is not until "outsider" evidence is brought to bear that people really listen. Being able to say "at UNC Charlotte they do X, Y, and Z" adds outsider-credibility to programmatic arguments. Years after that first meeting, when I took on a larger role as a WPA, I invited several WPAs that I'd met through CarWPA to my campus to lead sessions on curricular redesign in support of a major curricular overhaul that I was spearheading. The power of the external experts that I'd come to know through CarWPA helped move that curricular overhaul through to fruition.*

Similarly, if WPAs across a region and/or a university system have a structure in place to collaboratively respond to policy decisions by the university system administration, that united force can have more impact than responses from individual campuses. As Tracy explains,

*Through relationships formed at CarWPA events, many of us freely contact one another when we hear about something that may affect all UNC campuses. A few years ago, one WPA got word through her upper administration that ETS had been hired by the UNC system to create a standardized test to assess student writing at all UNC schools. About the same time, Wendy and I were notified by our institutional research office that there would be information sessions about this plan and that they wanted us to attend. Through our networked conversations with CarWPA members, many of us were able to attend an information session in Raleigh and through concerted efforts, ask questions of the ETS representatives, demonstrating our knowledge of writing assessment to the upper administration sitting in the room. At this point, a system-wide standard test has not been instituted. But once any of us hears rumbling of such a thing again, we will be ready to act together in response.*

The regional affiliate provides a structure for collaborative advocacy. While constituent campuses of a state university system are all hypotheti-

cally connected through that system, the diversity and complexity of institutional structures, in conjunction with geographical distances in many states, mean that a WPA is likely to face substantial challenges in communicating with other schools within the system. Communication networks, as Meg explains, are critical to mentoring, strategic action, and policy and curricular development, but they require a group of committed individuals to create them:

*The University of North Carolina higher education system includes 17 university campuses. They spread, like the state of North Carolina, from the Atlantic Ocean to the Appalachian Mountains. Five of the 17 are HBCUs; the smallest university has an enrollment of about 1,800 students; the largest almost 34,000. So, you can imagine the challenges faculty and staff face trying to communicate with colleagues across state universities. One of my first contacts with another North Carolina WPA was with Don Bushman at UNC Wilmington. This happened around 1997 or 1998 when I wanted to know if and how UNC Wilmington exempted incoming students from first-year composition because a student who had transferred from Wilmington to Charlotte wanted credit for composition. I spoke with Don, got an answer, and realized how important it was to have such a connection.*

*I poked around the UNC websites, made some contacts, and in March 1999 at the CWPA breakfast at CCCC, Marsha Lee Baker from Western Carolina University and I met and discussed the possibilities of pulling together the WPAs from all the state universities in North Carolina. We shared our experiences as directors and knew that getting together would be an exciting and productive experience. Marsha Lee was a new WPA and although our schools were very different, we had similar challenges. It was magical—someone actually knew my concerns and even shared a few. We stayed in touch over the next few weeks and put together a list of WPAs by checking websites and making phone calls. I remember making many phone calls, trying to contact people, trying to talk them into coming to a meeting. By the next month, we had scheduled a meeting that would take place on September 24 of the same year. Most of us had never met before, we had no idea of each other's programmatic practices and policies, but we were ready to throw ourselves into the fray.*

Once communication channels exist, an affiliate can provide for the sharing and pooling of resources on pressing issues—including placement, GTA training, and working conditions—for WPAs in the region. Subsequently, a secretary and a web coordinator (two positions that the CarWPA

now has on its Executive Board) can create a digital record that can be updated and shared.

A critical part of the mentoring provided through a regional affiliate is access to important information, including details that new WPAs may not realize they need until they are asked to provide them ASAP. Meg explains the priority CarWPA founders placed on gathering, preserving, and circulating information:

*Marsha Lee took great notes at our first meeting, and so we have an archive of the discussion and people's concerns. We discussed the use of part-time faculty and lectureships and compared salaries at different institutions for both positions. We discussed training for new lecturers and also for non-writing faculty who taught writing-intensive courses; we discussed program assessment, a hot topic in light of emerging national accreditation requirements. The meeting was a huge success; we talked a lot, shared information, got to know our peers, and by the end of the month had distributed contact information for writing program directors from twelve UNC campuses (out of fourteen at the time) and one private university (Duke).*

Once organized and in communication, the affiliate can establish mechanisms for gathering more information from a broader swath of institutions. The process of soliciting WPAs at other institutions also raises awareness of the organization, expanding the scope, reach, and information-capacity of the mentoring network. With expansion comes the opportunity for WPAs at different career stages and in varying institutional contexts to explore new ideas, as Meg elaborates below:

*At the first meeting, we also decided to participate in a survey about employment practices at UNC campuses administered by Erika Lindemann. Ten institutions participated in the survey, further evidence that we were beginning to come together and see the value of statewide information sharing. I believe we realized that knowing what other schools were doing, what policies were enacted, and how others were coping with issues current at the time would make our own decisions more informed and intelligent. Bolstered by the success of our first meeting and of the survey participation, we held our second statewide meeting the following September. Topics included the increasing dependence on part-time faculty for composition courses, and, from one of our rural campuses, the difficulty of hiring part-time faculty and a possible solution to that problem. We came to understand that our meetings taught us things: our professional friends were also our teachers and mentors who we could email*

*or call with day-to-day questions and who would help us solve WPA problems. By the end of this meeting, we had a working list of about two-dozen North Carolina WPAs.*

CarWPA gatherings create spaces to explore, commiserate, and collaborate—through large and small-group discussion, reflection, and writing—on common issues faced by WPAs. These issues have included the following: “Grants: Finding and Applying for Funding Opportunities” (Wildacres, 2011); “Tapping Institutional Priorities” (Wildacres, 2012); “Communities and Contact Zones: Doing Justice” (Wildacres, 2017); “Writing Courses Online: Dare We Go There?” (MinM, 2009); “Supporting ESL Writers and Showcasing Writing Programs” (MinM, 2010); “The Scholarship of Teaching” (MinM, 2011); “Working Conditions and Writing Instruction” (MinM, 2014); and “Advocacy in Classrooms, Programs, Research, and Beyond” (MinM, 2017).

It is also worth noting that informational resources developed within regional affiliates can be expanded through the national CWPA, a mutually beneficial partnership that Meg sought out fairly quickly:

*In March 2002, after several successful meetings and a very clear indication that WPAs in North Carolina were willing to make a commitment to meeting and discussing programmatic issues, Marsha Lee and I wrote a letter to Chris Anson, then President of the CWPA, to explore applying for affiliate status. Chris was extremely supportive without creating conflict of interest as a WPA at North Carolina State University. Moreover, the CWPA was offering a one-time grant of \$500 as start-up funds to new affiliates, a substantial incentive. In 2003, the CarWPA was officially made an affiliate of the national CWPA.*

## CONCLUSION: ADDRESSING CHALLENGES AND MENTORING FORWARD

We have all benefited significantly from our participation in the CarWPA. Certain aspects of mentoring, however, continue to challenge us: (1) involving WPAs from two-year institutions, and (2) appealing to WPAs from South Carolina. Perhaps because the organization started among a group of North Carolina WPAs at four-year institutions, the group has tended to have more representation from four-year schools in North Carolina. Partly in response to these two membership gaps, the CarWPA Board now includes four “at-large” members, two from NC and two from SC. The duties of these “at-large” members specifically pertain to outreach, with the goal of expanding the diversity of institutions represented in the organization, as we explain on our website:

*At-Large positions on the board serve multiple purposes. One is to ensure representation from both states (NC/SC). Another is to conduct outreach within the representative state to recruit other members from NC/SC and community colleges. At-Large positions also help to organize both the MinM and the annual fall retreat. ("Board Member Responsibilities")*

We have also emphasized outreach by directly addressing the challenges we face: we focused the 2018 MinM on the topic "2020 Vision: Building Connections and Coalitions across Campuses." We hope these efforts will lead to greater representation from across the Carolinas and, in particular, from two-year schools, although the heavy course load and often transitory nature of employment at community colleges may make joining the organization and participating in even a one-day event very difficult. We remain hopeful, and we have seen some results, including record attendance at the 2019 MinM and a President-Elect from South Carolina.

Despite ongoing challenges, we are all incredibly thankful for CarWPA, and we are happy to report that other regions have heard of our affiliate and sought out additional information about it. Partly in response to the interest expressed, the four of us presented the CarWPA history at the 2015 national CWPA convention. That presentation and this article are themselves tangible recognitions of the mentoring traditions that we have established in CarWPA. As we share with colleagues from outside the Carolinas what our affiliate does, we find ourselves in a position to mentor others who are seeking to organize affiliates. As Tracy explains,

*I have had several emails and conversations including sharing our Constitution and our process to establish ourselves as a not for profit organization with writing instructors and WPAs on their way to becoming an affiliate of CWPA. We are proud of our not for profit status that happened in 2017—it reflects the work that began a few Presidents and Executive Boards ago. While we have yet to experience all the possible benefits from our new status, we are proud of the sustaining work we have accomplished as the CarWPA. We use the resources in our states to serve our needs and it has worked well for us. We are happy to share strategies with others.*

Our experiences in the CarWPA suggest that many more WPAs might be mentored through regional affiliates, and there is currently much room for growth: as of 2020, there are only 12 regional affiliates ("CWPA Affiliate Organizations"). This is not to say that a strong national organization is not valuable—indeed, the national conversation enabled via venues such as this journal are proof of that value. Yet, localized groups can allow for more frequent and more immediate non-hierarchical mentoring. We hope

that the experiences relayed here convince readers that expanding the number and reach of affiliate WPA organizations is a particularly promising endeavor. We invite you to explore our affiliate by visiting our website at [www.carolinaswpa.org](http://www.carolinaswpa.org) or by contacting us personally.

## WORKS CITED

- Ashe, Diana, and Elizabeth Ervin. "Mentoring Friendships and the 'Reweaving of Authority.'" *Stories of Mentoring: Theory and Praxis*, edited by Michelle F. Eble and Lynée Lewis Gaillet, Parlor P, 2008, pp. 83–97.
- "Board Member Responsibilities." Carolinas Writing Program Administrators, [carolinaswpa.org/about-2/board](http://carolinaswpa.org/about-2/board). Accessed 21 Aug. 2017.
- Casciaro, Tiziana, and Miguel Sousa Lobo. "Competent Jerks, Lovable Fools, and the Formation of Social Networks." *Harvard Business Review*, June 2005, pp. 92–99.
- Charlton, Jonnika, and Shirley K Rose. "Twenty More Years in the WPA's Progress." *WPA: Writing Program Administration*, vol. 33, nos. 1–2, 2009, pp. 114–45.
- Chon, Kaye, and Thomas A. Maier. *Welcome to Hospitality: An Introduction*. Cengage, 2009.
- "CWPA Affiliate Organizations." *Council of Writing Program Administrators*, [associationdatabase.com/aws/CWPA/pt/sp/affiliates](http://associationdatabase.com/aws/CWPA/pt/sp/affiliates). Accessed 30 Dec. 2020.
- Dunbar, Denise P., and Ruth T. Kinnersley. "Mentoring Female Administrators Toward Leadership Success." *Delta Kappa Gamma Bulletin*, vol. 77, no. 3, 2011, pp. 17–24.
- Eble, Michelle F., and Lynée Lewis Gaillet, editors. *Stories of Mentoring: Theory and Praxis*. Parlor P, 2008.
- Gaillet, Lynée Lewis and Michelle F. Eble. "Re-inscribing Mentoring." *Retellings: Opportunities for Feminist Research in Rhetoric and Composition Studies*, edited by Jessica Enoch and Jordynn Jack, Parlor P, 2019, pp. 283–303.
- Glenn, Cheryl, and Roxanne Mountford. "Networked Feminism: Mentoring in the New Economy." *Rhetoric and Writing Studies in the New Century: Historiography, Pedagogy, and Politics*, edited by Cheryl Glenn and Roxanne Mountford, Southern Illinois UP, 2017, pp. 173–94.
- Inman, Joyce Olewski. "Reflections on Year One as an Almost-WPA." *WPA: Writing Program Administration*, vol. 35, no. 1, 2011, pp. 149–52.
- Keller, Elizabeth J. *Rhetorical Strategies for Professional Development: Investment Mentoring in Classrooms and Workplaces*. Routledge, 2018.
- Kram, Kathy E., and Belle Rose Ragins. "The Landscape of Mentoring in the 21st Century." *The Handbook of Mentoring at Work: Theory, Research, and Practice*, edited by Belle Rose Ragins and Kathy E. Kram, SAGE, 2007, pp. 659–92.
- Ostergaard, Lori, Gregory Giberson, and Jim Nugent, editors. "A Symposium on Mentoring the Work of WPAs." *WPA: Writing Program Administration*, vol. 35, no. 1, 2011, pp. 148–66.

Stolley, Amy Ferdinandt. "Narratives, Administrative Identity, and the Early Career WPA." *WPA: Writing Program Administration*, vol. 39, no. 1, 2015, pp. 18–31.

Thoune, Darci. "The Pleasures and Perils of Being First." *WPA: Writing Program Administration*, vol. 35, no. 1, 2011, pp. 156–59.

Walcher, Sheldon, Joseph Janangelo, and Duane Roen. "Introducing 'The CWPA Mentoring Project' and Survey Report." *WPA: Writing Program Administration*, vol. 34, no. 1, 2010, pp. 84–116.

**Marsha Lee Baker** (mlbaker@email.wcu.edu) is professor emerita of rhetoric and composition studies at Western Carolina University. She was the first specialist to direct the English department's core writing program. Her research, teaching, service, and activism focus on peace and nonviolence, as found in *English Journal* (2000), *Reflections* (2008), and *Composition Studies* (2014).

**Meg Morgan** (mpmorgan@uncc.edu) is associate professor emerita of English at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte and now volunteers for its Center for Teaching and Learning. She taught for thirty years at Charlotte in technical/professional writing and also served as director of first-year writing for nine years.

**Tracy Ann Morse** (morset@ecu.edu) is associate professor of rhetoric and composition and director of Writing Foundations in the Department of English at East Carolina University. She co-edited *Reclaiming Accountability: Using the Work of Rel/Accreditation to Improve Writing Programs* (2016) and *Critical Conversations about Plagiarism* (2013), both published by Parlor Press. Her book, *Signs and Wonders: Religious Rhetoric and the Preservation of Sign Language* (2014), was published by Gallaudet University Press. Her work has been published in *WPA: Writing Program Administration*, *Rhetoric Review*, *Disability Studies Quarterly*, and the *Journal of Teaching Writing*.

**Wendy Sharer** (sharerw@ecu.edu) is professor of rhetoric and composition in the Department of English at East Carolina University, where she just completed her work as director of the Quality Enhancement Plan, "Write Where You Belong." In addition to *Reclaiming Accountability: Using the Work of Rel/Accreditation to Improve Writing Programs* (Parlor Press, 2016), her co-edited publications include *Working in the Archives* (Southern Illinois University Press, 2009), and *Rhetorical Education in America* (Alabama University Press, 2004). She has also authored *Vote and Voice: Women's Organizations and Political Literacy* (Southern Illinois University Press, 2004) and *1977: A Cultural Moment in Composition* (with Jack Selzer and Brent Henze, Parlor Press, 2007).

